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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [SENV](#) [ENRG](#) [TBIO](#) [IZ](#) [KU](#)

SUBJECT: OES A/S MCMURRAY TALKS ENVIRONMENT, AVIAN FLU, AND
POLIO WITH KUWAITIS

REF: KUWAIT 39

11. (SBU) Summary. On January 10, Assistant Secretary for Oceans, Environment, and Science Claudia McMurray met with Meshal Al-Meshan of the Kuwait Environmental Protection Society (KEPS), Captain Ali Haider of the Environment Public Authority (EPA), and Assistant U/S of Health Ali Al-Saif to discuss environmental issues in Kuwait. The meetings took place on the margins of the regional Women Leaders in Science, Technology, and Engineering Conference held in Kuwait January 8-10. Al-Meshan was critical of the GOK's environmental record, noting that the Environment Public Authority (EPA) Director position has been vacant for several months and the parliamentary environment committee formed in 2006 has never met. Al-Meshan said the GOK addresses Kuwait's high levels of water consumption by building more desalination plants but does not work to combat wasteful consumption, and he argued for a consumer education campaign to limit water wastage. The EPA's Haider said Iran's Bushehr reactor is a major concern for the GOK from an environmental point of view. Kuwait, he said, still suffers from polluted coastal areas resulting from the 1991 oil fires, and that chemical leakage from wrecked vessels is an ongoing concern. Haider conceded that desalination causes marine pollution, and that there is not likely to be a change on the ban of treated wastewater in the drinking supply. Al-Saif said the GOK has set-up an interministerial committee to combat Avian Influenza, and no cases have yet been detected in Kuwait. At A/S McMurray's urging, Al-Saif said he would raise possible funding for polio eradication with the Minister of Health. (Note: U/S Dobriansky raise polio eradication separately with the Foreign Minister, who suggested that UNICEF approach the GOK.) End Summary.

12. (SBU) On January 10, A/S McMurray met with Professor Meshal Al-Meshan of the Kuwait Environmental Protection Society (KEPS) on the margins of the Women Leaders in Science, Technology, and Engineering conference, which brought together female scientists and educators from all over the Middle East and the United States (reftel). Al-Meshan runs KEPS (a Kuwait NGO for the environment and a 2006 MEPI grant recipient) part-time as a volunteer and works at the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training. Al-Meshan said KEPS visits more than 100 Kuwaiti schools each year to engage students about the environment, and partners with Kuwait University to raise public awareness. KEPS, he said, is also involved in a study with the Arab Fund and the University of Jordan to compare water sectors in the GCC countries.

Government is the Big Polluter

¶3. (SBU) Al-Meshan said the GOK is the biggest polluter in Kuwait by virtue of its ownership of all power plants, petroleum infrastructure, and landfills. The Environment Public Authority (EPA), he said, "works for the government" and would only be effective if it were an independent entity.

Al-Meshan cited the EPA Director position being vacant as evidence of the GOK's inattention to environmental issues, and noted that a Parliamentary environment committee formed in 2006 has never met. (Note: Al-Meshan also claimed that the GOK has no contingency plans for a possible oil tanker or refinery accident, although Post's discussions with GOK oil-sector contacts indicate otherwise.)

GOK Focuses on Water Supply, Not Demand

¶4. (SBU) Al-Meshan was especially critical of GOK water policy, stating that there is no effort to reduce Kuwait's high water consumption (108 gallons per day, per person) with the focus instead on increasing supply by building more desalination plants, which are expensive and are major pollution sources. Government water subsidies and the lack of an effective metering system are also problems, he said. Of water sources aside from desalination, Al-Meshan said that 40% of Kuwait's groundwater is tainted by petroleum as a result of the 1991 oil fires, and religious and political objections remain formidable barriers to the introduction of treated wastewater into the potable water system. The EPA's Haider agreed that a change of policy on using wastewater is unlikely in the near future.

Acting EPA Head Says Bushehr Reactor a Concern

¶5. (SBU) Acting EPA Director Captain Ali Haider said marine pollution was one of his primary concerns, noting that the threat of radiation leakage from Iran's Bushehr reactor has prompted the Ministry of Health to install sensors and the GOK to draw up a broader contingency plan. Kuwait's coast, particularly in the south, is still heavily polluted from the 1990 Iraqi invasion and the EPA is still engaged in cleaning up oil lakes. Haider said chemical leakage from wrecked vessels off Kuwait's coast, in the Khor Abdullah, and the Shaat Al-Arab waterways is causing problems, and that the EPA is working with the UNDP and the Regional Organization for the Protection of the Marine Environment (ROPME, a multinational body of the six GCC countries plus Iran) on clean-up efforts. The EPA is also working on building a network of protected environmental areas and is trying to establish new industrial zones away from major population centers. Haider said that a large portion of UN-administered compensation funds from Iraq are going to the Public Authority for Agriculture and Fish Resources (PAAAFR) and the Kuwait Oil Company for environmental remediation projects which are currently being tendered.

No Avian Flu in Kuwait

¶6. (SBU) Ali Al-Saif, Assistant U/S at the Ministry of Health, said the GOK has formed an interministerial committee composed of representatives from the ministries of Health, Finance, the EPA, and the PAAAFR to coordinate Kuwait's Avian Influenza (AI) response efforts. To date there have been no cases of AI in Kuwait despite its location on a major bird migration route and the large volume of border traffic coming from Iraq (which has had AI cases). Saif said the GOK has sufficient laboratory capacity and stocks of Tamiflu, and the PAAAFR is effectively monitoring migratory birds in the country. Efforts are ongoing to train doctors and veterinarians to recognize AI.

A/S McMurray Urges GOK Support on Polio Eradication

¶7. (SBU) A/S McMurray raised polio eradication with Al-Saif, urging the Health Ministry to push India, Pakistan,

Afghanistan, and Nigeria to support eradication efforts, and noting that polio would be a top priority for the new Director General of the WHO. A/S McMurray also asked that the GOK help close the funding gap for polio eradication, to which Al-Said responded that he would raise the issue with the Minister of Health.

18. (U) A/S McMurray did not clear this message before departing post.

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